ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263520050

Are legendary hominoids worth looking for? Views from ethnobiology and palaeoanthropology (Respond to this article at)

Article *in* Anthropology Today · April 2012

DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8322.2012.00861.x

CITATIONS
3

READS
600

1 author:

Gregory Forth
University of Alberta
112 PUBLICATIONS **779** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

All content following this page was uploaded by Gregory Forth on 05 March 2018.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

Are legendary hominoids worth looking for?

Views from ethnobiology and palaeoanthropology

Gregory Forth
Gregory Forth is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta. He has been conducting ethnographic research on the Indonesian island of Flores since 1984. His recent titles include Images of the wildman in Southeast Asia *(Routledge, 2008),* Guardians of the land in Kelimado *(KITLV Press, 2004),* Nage birds *(Routledge, 2004), and* Dualism and hierarchy *(Oxford University Press, 2001). His email is gforth@ualberta.ca.*

The study of folk biology – local or 'vernacular' knowledge of animals and plants – presents any anthropological researcher with a special challenge. Unless one adopts a radically relativist view, it is always necessary, in order to form some idea of the possibilities of explanation, to gauge how far folk ideas match those of international science, or at least some pan-human experience of natural kinds – the sort of perception anyone might have when confronted with species present in the territory of a particular ethnolinguistic group. For this reason, the anthropologist must have a purchase not only on the culture and language of a human community, but also on scientific zoology and botany – at least as these concern a given region.

Ethnobiologists – anthropologists whose specialty it is to explore, analyse, and explain indigenous biological knowledge – are advantaged in this regard. Their research typically involves a detailed investigation of local fauna and flora, in some instances including the collection and preservation of specimens, not only for use in questioning on indigenous nomenclature, classification, and the like, but for the purposes of scientific identification. By contrast, ordinary sociocultural anthropologists usually have no such advantage, and even informants' unequivocal claims that, for example, only the feathers of a bird locally known as X can be used in a certain ceremony, can leave an author with a practically insuperable problem of translation and often a glaringly incomplete analysis (i.e. 'The So-and-So state that the feathers effect the transfer of the souls of recently deceased persons to the afterworld, and that these can only come from the X bird, which I was unable to identify').

Informants' descriptions of the colour, size, calls, and habits of the bird might help fill in the blanks, but while these may be very helpful, they cannot substitute for a definite ornithological identification. Things would appear rather easier when an anthropologist is told, for example, that crocodiles lay eggs or leopards eat only meat. Everyone 'knows' this already. But what about when the zoologically uninformed fieldworker hears about a bat that catches fish or a porcupine that scares off hunting dogs by making a sound like a rattlesnake? (Both reports, by the way, are empirically valid and in accord with international science. The Fisherman bat *Noctilio leporinus* of Latin America catches fish, as do several species of the widespread genus *Myotis*, while the Javan porcupine *Hystrix javanica*, when alarmed, makes a rattling noise by shaking hollow quills attached to its tail.)

Degrees of credibility

The subjects of this article are categories, recognized and named by the people of Flores island in eastern Indonesia, of relatively small, usually hairy-bodied humanlike creatures with simian faces which are described as leading an entirely or mostly cultureless existence in remote forests and caves. As detailed elsewhere (Forth 1998, 2008), the hominoids (as I hereafter call them) sound remarkably like palaeoanthropological reconstructions of a primitive hominin which has been interpreted as a new species and designated *Homo floresiensis*.[1] Announced via the world media over seven years ago, when the type specimen quickly became known as 'the Hobbit', these hominins survived at Liang Bua (the Flores discovery site) until 17,000 years ago (Morwood *et al*. 2009) or even more recent times, with one interpretation including dates that range to 6,000 years ago (Brown & Maeda 2009: 575).

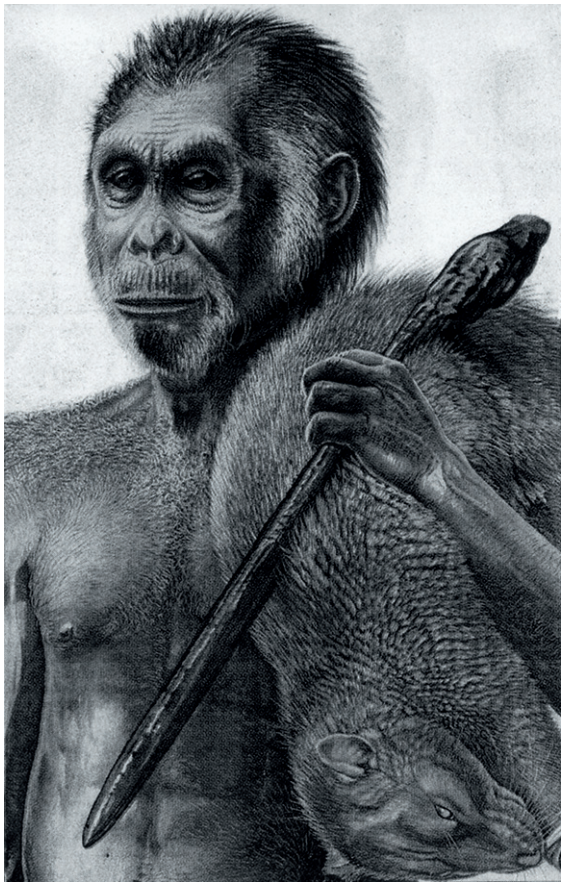
Not long after the announcement, the question arose of a possible connection between what evidently is – or was – a diminutive species of the genus *Homo* (physically more primitive than, and in other ways quite distinct from our own species) and hominoid images represented and maintained by Florenese villagers. In addressing this question, it is useful to focus on a particular hominoid category, one the Nage people of central Flores name *ebu gogo*. Nage describe *ebu gogo* as a kind of natural creature, although one that is extinct (having been exterminated by their ancestors several hundred years ago) and which, moreover, presents problems for their indigenous classification, falling midway between 'animals' (*ana wa*) and 'humans' (*kita ata*). Nage are quite certain that the *ebu gogo* were not Long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*), the only non-human primate species known from Flores which they unambiguously classify as animals. But they are equally emphatic that the hominoids differed radically from spirits.

Lacking material proof of their existence, an anthropologist or ethnobiologist might nevertheless endeavour to locate creatures like *ebu gogo* somewhere on what might be called a scale of scientific credibility. Local spiritual beings, especially those categorized as *nitu* (roughly 'nature spirits'), occupy one end of this scale. For Nage, these too resemble humans, but are more specifically likened to physically, psychologically, and behaviourally modern humans. Indeed, the spirits are represented as beings in many ways superior to humans – unlike the physically primitive hominoids which, except in regard to physical strength, Nage describe as decidedly inferior. The spirits' superiority is exemplified by their characterization as essentially invisible, as capable of transforming into non-human animals, and as not subject to various physical laws. On recording all this, most anthropologists would surely assume that *nitu* spirits are not grounded in an experience of any natural species. (Spirits are, of course, commonly interpreted anthropologically as reflecting

RYAN SOMMA/ CC BY-SA 2.0

Fig. 1 (right). *The reconstruction of* Homo floresiensis *that appeared in several publications after the discovery was announced in 2004.*

Fig. 2 (above). *A cast of the skull of the* Homo floresiensis *holotype, American Museum of Natural History.*



PETER SCHOUTEN / REUTERS / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

interaction with ordinary human beings, but this necessarily assumes a cognitive transformation that radically transcends empirical human attributes.)

Moving along the credibility scale, we might find what Nage call *manu ke'o*, a creature taking the form of a large serpent with the head of a cock (Forth 1998). Since these creatures are additionally credited with the ability to fly (a claim only sometimes supported with a further reference to wings) and with specific supernatural powers, the most obvious interpretation is that one is dealing with an imaginary being. The image has a probable basis in experiences of pythons, two species of which exist on Flores, while certain features suggest influence from depictions of Chinese dragons. Yet the essentially spiritual character of the *manu ke'o* is confirmed by Nage statements describing the creature as a specific form assumed by spirits (*nitu*).

Further along, and closer to the scientifically credible end of our scale, would appear the 'two-headed snake' (*nipa ulu pali*) and a reputedly legless bird Nage call *leba*. These too sound quite fantastic, and an outside investigator, especially one not motivated to look for possible empirical correlates, might well presume that they are fundamentally imaginary, like the cock-headed serpent (*manu ke'o*), and then proceed to search for their origin in the realm of myth or ritual practice – or perhaps beyond, in local social structure or a culturally specific symbolic system. More familiarity with local fauna, however, would reveal that *nipa ulu pali* denotes the rare but certainly real, Island pipe-snake (*Cylindrophis opisthorhodus*), the head and tail of which have evolved to resemble one another; a probable protective adaptation. Similarly, the *leba* turns out to be the Savannah nightjar (*Caprimulgus affinis*), a nocturnal bird with very small (and thus infrequently observed) legs (Forth 2004). In case these are taken simply as instances of odd naming or hyperbole, it should be noted that many – though not all – Nage describe the pipe-snake as possessing two complete heads (each with eyes, a mouth, and teeth), while just as many insist that the nightjar lacks lower limbs entirely. At the same time, the snake has very little symbolic significance. Its name provides a metaphor for double-dealing humans, and there is a belief that if a specimen is found on newly cleared land, then the plot will not be fertile; but otherwise the creature is regarded simply as an oddity. As discussed elsewhere, physical features of the nightjar can illuminate its significance as an inauspicious omen for nocturnal hunters, but its putative legglessness is merely one component of these, and in fact the interpretation works almost as well with reference to the bird's actual possession of pathetically small and ineffectual legs and feet as well as a tiny bill (Forth 2004: 130-133).

The status of the hominoids

The question now is where legendary hominoids like the *ebu gogo* fall along this scale. They are certainly not spirits, as Nage deny they had supernatural powers. By the same token, they are very different from mystically powerful creatures like the cock-headed serpent. Might they then be comparable to legless nightjars, perhaps as a representation of a group of *Homo sapiens* whose attributed physical features (small size, monkey-like faces, hairy bodies) are similarly a product of exaggeration and infrequent observation?[2] In making this determination, one problem of course is that the *ebu gogo* are described as extinct; hence they cannot be directly encountered in the local environment in the same way as Savannah nightjars or the pipe-snake – both species having been securely documented (or 'discovered') by scientific ornithologists and herpetologists. Members of other Florenese hominoid categories associated with other parts of the island are by contrast said to survive in small numbers. But while these are similarly represented as natural rather than supernatural beings, they are further described as rare, elusive, and inhabiting places difficult to access. The sceptic might find this all very convenient. Yet in this instance, I would argue, there is reason to suspend scepticism (which in any case, rather than providing an explanation, merely defines an attitude) and to look for a solution in another direction.

This other direction involves hypothetically identifying Florenese hominoids with a species that may no longer be present in the local environment, but which might have been present sufficiently recently to be retained as a largely accurate representation of something empirical. I refer of course to *Homo floresiensis*, a hominin whose possible extinction date is inferred only from palaeontological evidence pertaining to a single site; the discovery of the site in western Flores. This indeed is standard procedure in palaeontology; yet it can easily be forgotten that the most recent date for specimens of presumably extinct species – especially if known only from a single location – may not necessarily be the extinction date for the species as a whole. In addition, there is no reason to believe that *Homo floresiensis* did not survive for considerably longer in more easterly regions of Flores (a large island some 400km in length) and during a period when modern humans were also present.

A possible problem with this hypothesis is, ironically, not the reality of hominoid images, whose existence as distinctive components of local folk zoology is by now well established, but the reality of *Homo floresienis*. Not everyone accepts that the skeletal remains belong to a new hominin species. Immediately after this interpretation was published, the Indonesian palaeoanthropologist Teuku Jacob and several western specialists argued that the remains belonged to a modern human suffering from microcephaly (a congenital condition manifest in an extremely small brain) or a victim of cretinism caused by dietary deficiency – or rather a group of people affected in these ways, since the discovery site contained the remains of as many as a dozen individuals. One critic, Professor Maciej Henneberg (2011), has even claimed that the teeth of the holotype, or type specimen, contain a dental filling, thus attesting to a twentieth century derivation. If these objections are correct, then connecting indigenous representations of small-bodied hominoids with the physical remains of equally small hominins would involve basing a local image of dubious empirical status on a palaeanthropological image lacking in any empirical foundation.

However, since the discovery of the hominin remains was announced in 2004, the weight of evidence and analysis in favour of *Homo floresiensis* as a new species has increased considerably, other interpretations have been effectively countered, and the thesis has gained some notable supporters. A good summary of the present state of the debate, detailed but accessible to non-specialists, can be found in Aiello (2010). One might therefore say that a hypothetical empirical referent for local hominoid images like the Nage *ebu gogo* has not only stood the test of time but has gained in strength since the controversial introduction of *Homo floresiensis* over seven years ago.

Clearly, the survival of the palaeanthropological hypothesis is essential for the cultural interpretation of indigenous Florenese hominoid images as a representation of a non-sapiens hominin living on the island in the recent, or perhaps not so recent, past. The suggestion that images like *ebu gogo* may reflect 'a former component of the human population of Flores that is no longer present' was first published, six years before the discovery of *Homo floresiensis*, in Forth (1998: 105), while the possibility of a connection between the new found hominin and the legendary hominoids, first attributed to members of the *Homo floresiensis* discovery team, was advertised shortly after the

1. 'Hominin' refers to members of the sub-family Homininae which includes the several species of *Homo* and the Australopithecines.

2. More specifically, it may be asked whether the hominoids might not reflect past encounters between Austronesian-speaking immigrant cultivators, and earlier arrived and somewhat phenotypically distinct food-collectors, who have sometimes been identified as 'negritos' (Verhoeven 1958). As discussed elsewhere (Forth 2008: 275-80), however, this interpretation has been shown to be in several respects problematic.

3. I first heard about this during a research visit in 2008. Large wild cats are now scarce in central Flores, and I learned of the method only as a former practice, from men in the Rawe district, a relatively remote region some distance from my usual field sites.

4. In case it is thought that the source of these materials may be remains not of Long-tailed macaques (a species introduced to Flores by modern humans some 4,000 years ago) but of some extinct non-human primate, it should be noted that there is no palaeontological evidence for apes or other relatively large tailless primates inhabiting eastern Indonesian islands in geologically recent times. Orang-utans occur on Borneo and in northern Sumatra, and species of gibbons are found on both islands as well as on Java, but none of these apes occurs anywhere east of Wallace's Line.

5. *Flores man or the tale of the last hobbits* by Laurent Orluc, Ex Nihilo Films, 2011.

6. I have chosen not to reveal the exact location of the site, for fear of the sort of premature media attention with which some researchers working on Flores will already be familiar. Where the grave mentioned by Erb was located remains unclear, as Erb (who kindly answered my e-mail enquiries on this) can no longer recall further details she may have heard in the 1980s. Several circumstances, however, suggest it is the same one I discovered in 2010 and revisited in 2011.

ROSINO / CC BY-SA 2.0

Fig. 3. *Cave where the remains of* Homo floresiensis *where discovered in 2003. Liang Bua, Flores, Indonesia 2007.*

media announcement. But what is the present status of this largely social anthropological and ethnobiological interpretation, which was briefly discussed in relation to the new palaeoanthropological discovery in an earlier article in ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY (Forth 2005) and explored at greater length in a subsequent book (Forth 2008)?

Recent developments

Actually, several more recent developments in palaeoanthropological investigation and analysis appear to have increased the fit, so to speak, between the reconstruction of *Homo floresiensis* and the physical and behavioural details of local Florenese hominoid images. While this is not the place to go into details, these include arguments for *Homo floresiensis* descending from, and retaining features of, a hominin older and more primitive than *Homo erectus* (see e.g. Argue *et al*. 2009, Brown & Maeda 2009). *Homo erectus* was initially proposed as the tiny hominin's predecessor on Flores, but quite apart from the fact that *erectus* remains have never been found on the island, the newer interpretation better explains *floresiensis*'s very small body size and much smaller brain.

Another development is the discovery, at Denisova in Siberia, of evidence for a 40,000 year old hominin of a species other than *Homo sapiens* or *Homo neanderthalensis*, but contemporary with both, which, moreover, appears to have hybridized with modern human populations in Melanesia (Reich *et al*. 2010). This discovery does not of course provide direct support for a link between modern Florenese images of hominoids and *Homo floresiensis*. But, like other recent evidence – including skeletal material dating to 67,000 years ago from the Philippines, belonging to a hominin with the morphological and size ranges of *Homo habilis* and *Homo floresiensis* (Mijares *et al*. 2010) – it does fill out an emerging picture of the contemporaneous, even sympatric, existence of two or more hominin species throughout the course of human evolution, and in some cases until geologically very recent times.

Possible sympatry further raises the fascinating question of potential hybridization between *Homo floresiensis* and *Homo sapiens*, although given the apparently recent entry of modern humans into Flores, and local stories describing mass killings of hominoids by the ancestors of the present population, one should also recall evidence for the extinction of *Homo erectus* in Java and *Homo neanderthelensis* in Europe not long after the arrival of *Homo sapiens* in those regions. Florenese legends of hominoid extirpation might seem like some of the most fantastic claims made about the creatures. But from what we know of the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, and indeed the entire history of our species, they are arguably among the most credible (Forth 2011b).

From the ethnographic side, further investigation and analysis over the last three years potentially resolve certain problems posed by features of indigenous representations of hominoids – including their lacking any sort of technology and certain dietary habits – which do not clearly match the archaeological evidence for *Homo floresiensis* and might otherwise reduce the credibility of the images. For example, seemingly fanciful references to Florenese hominoids stealing and consuming wood charcoal, in connection with their reputed further consumption of potentially toxic foodstuffs, are rendered more believable, even realistic, by reference to comparable practices by modern primates and humans (Forth 2011a). Similarly, a practice, recounted in more than one legend, of exterminating cave-dwelling hominoids by setting fire to Arenga palm fibre placed in the mouths of occupied caves, turns out to be a regular way in which people in central Flores, by an identical use of fire, extirpate bothersome wild mammals of attested species, particularly large feral cats (see Forth 2011b).[3] Although the material has yet to be published, it may finally be mentioned that further investigation of sites reputedly inhabited by legendary hominoids during the last millennium point to ecologically viable scenarios regarding the availability of water and plant and animal foods, which are consistent with what local people regularly relate about the territorial behaviour and subsistence practices of former hominoid populations.

All this, however, merely expands the circumstantial evidence, and while it increases the plausibility of a connection between the hominoids and a non-sapiens hominin, it does not directly attest to the accuracy of Florenese villagers' statements about one of their folk zoological categories. Nor of course does it provide a basis for palaeoanthropological statements about *Homo floresiensis* – although if it could be established that indigenous hominoid representations substantially reflect the newfound hominin, then the former could significantly contribute, in a novel and remarkable way, to an understanding of a species so far known only from skeletal and archaeological evidence. Nevertheless, present ethnographic, as well as palaeoanthropological, knowledge does suggest directions for future research, and particularly further investigations into the character of *Homo floresiensis*. These remarks illuminate an asymmetry which is worthy of some reflection. Clearly, the ethnographic evidence of hominoid categories is not judged to be sufficient substantiation for the existence, or nature, of a hominin species which, as far as we know, may have disappeared over ten thousand years ago. Nor would I want to suggest that it should be. Conversely, though, solid palaeontological evidence for a very recently surviving non-sapiens hominin would not only be a major palaeoanthropological discovery but would go a considerable way towards affirming the empirical character of indigenous hominoids.

Obviously, then, what is required is material evidence of physical bodies, chronologically overlapping substantially with *Homo sapiens* on Flores and sufficiently recent to have accurately informed indigenous representations of recently extinct or even possibly surviving hominoids. To find such physical evidence, one would of course have to look for it. So the question becomes: is this problem worth exploring archaeologically and palaeontologically? For the most part this would involve excavating in caves and other sites where, according to local legends, hominoids lived and in some instances were killed by human antagonists. Emerging evidence also indicates that, in one part of Flores, a region where small humanlike creatures are said still to survive, people may possess skeletal remains and teeth. If these reports are accurate, and if researchers can gain ethical access to the relics, then inspection by an osteologically trained anthropologist should be able to determine their derivation. Although I have not yet been able to fully follow up such reports – and I should say straightaway that I do not have the osteological expertise to interpret such things – some are compelling. These concern skulls far larger than those of Flores' only known non-human primate, the Long-tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*), and indeed of dimensions comparable to the

Aiello, L.C. 2010. Five years of *Homo floresiensis*. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 142(2): 167-99.

Argue, D. *et al*. 2009. *Homo floresiensis*: A cladistic analysis. *Journal of Human Evolution* 57: 623-639.

Brown, P. & T. Maeda 2009. Liang Bua *Homo floresiensis* mandibles and mandibular teeth: A contribution to the comparative morphology of a new hominin species. *Journal of Human Evolution* 57: 571-596.

skull of the holotype of *Homo floresiensis*. One may thus be reminded of Von Koenigswald's discovery of the teeth of the giant ape that came to be known as *Gigantopithecus* in a Chinese apothecary's shop – partly because, like the shop's contents, the remains ascribed to some Florenese hominoids are similarly attributed with magical efficacy.[4]

There is one putative relic of which I have been able to obtain a sample: a small fragment of what was described as a hominoid skull. This has been inspected by the primatologist Colin Groves, who has identified it as belonging to the foramen magnum occipital condyle of a macaque. Insofar as this preliminary finding suggests fakery as a component of local claims about recently surviving hominoids, it obviously does not bode well for further study of this sort. Nevertheless, the determination does at least point to another line of anthropological enquiry in understanding the images, and one which retains an empirical focus and does not entail their complete reduction to immaterial spirits or imaginary beings. If people are passing off monkey bones as hominoid remains, then rather than proving that hominoids are nothing more than macaques, the deception conforms to the commonly expressed local conviction that, especially in their facial appearance, the hominoids resemble monkeys.

Anthropological responses

The interpretation of Florenese hominoid images as reflecting past encounters between humans and equally empirical creatures has inspired little interest among sociocultural anthropologists. In fact, the entire topic seems largely to have been ignored, mainly I suspect because most anthropologists would dismiss the images as essentially fictional representations of creatures that exist only in the 'social imagination' of Florenese villagers and which are therefore to be explained as cultural constructs relating to (thus far unidentified) social processes, values, or relationships. Among paleoanthropologists, however, things may be different. Thus, in a recent documentary film,[5] Mike Morwood, the archaeologist and Australian leader of the team that discovered the type specimen, has stated that *Homo floresiensis* could have lived on Flores until the time of Dutch colonial contact with the island, presumably meaning sometime in the nineteenth century. Referring to the seeming incredibility of this scenario, he also points to the discovery of the geologically very recent species and asks rhetorically, 'who would have predicted this ten years ago?'

Along the same lines, Australian and Indonesian archaeologists have recently expressed an interest in searching for traces of non-sapiens hominins through the excavation of locations associated with legends of exterminated hominoids. One site, located in the East Manggarai region of western Flores, contains a burial mound which is claimed to mark a mass grave containing the remains of hominoid creatures locally known as *ngiung* (Forth 2011). Following references to a *ngiung* grave in a doctoral thesis by cultural anthropologist Maribeth Erb (1987; see also Forth 2011: 58-59), and acting partly on the request of an Australian colleague, in July 2010 I was able to determine the exact location of the Manggarai site, take photographs and measurements, and collect information on its history.[6] Then in July 2011, Australian palaeoanthropologists and officials of the Indonesian National Centre for Archaeological Research (ARKENAS) whom I had informed of the reputed grave, visited the site and confirmed that the mound was man-made and was therefore worth excavating. In a way that will doubtless be familiar to many archaeologists and palaeontologists, further investigation was precluded owing to disagreements within the land-owning clan, whose members, while not opposed in principle, were unable to reach agreement about the proper procedures, including ritual performances, that will have to be followed before excavation can commence. However, negotiations continue, and one may remain hopeful. There is of course no guarantee that the site will contain remains of anatomically primitive hominins. Even so, excavation may yet reveal some concrete basis for the local legend and, even if the evidence indicates that nothing was ever buried there, the result should illuminate aspects of hominoid representations that can further determine their character. As a sociocultural anthropologist, my primary concern is after all not physical remains but cultural images, and evidence relevant to this kind of interest can take many forms.

Challenges to anthropology

After considering the problem over several years, I have come to the view that the most parsimonious explanation of Florenese hominoid images is local experience, historical or recent, of a population of so far unidentified creatures corresponding closely to the local descriptions. In large part, this interpretation, and the sort of further research it projects, might be called 'cryptozoological', that is, concerned with the investigation of species not recognized by international science. For this reason alone, some will immediately consider it suspect. Indeed, the topic involves a type of research no sensible supervisor would encourage graduate students or junior colleagues to undertake; but senior anthropologists, whose scholarly credentials are better established, should be less reluctant. Certainly, the kind of research collaboration outlined above represents a rare opportunity for substantial cooperation among anthropological sub-disciplines that can build on theoretical and methodological knowledge contributed by practitioners of several sorts of anthropology.

Since looking for the source of hominoid images in empirical creatures is not the only possible path to their comprehension, the problem may eventually find a solution in things non-material, and so outside the specific areas of competence of palaeoanthropologists and archaeologists. Yet, until the material hypothesis is decisively ruled out, the problem also presents a serious challenge to sociocultural anthropologists, particularly ones who are epistemologically predisposed to accounting for these kinds of images as fantastic figures, rooted in social processes or an exclusively cultural experience – or perhaps in pan-human cognitive proclivities to entertain the existence of things for which perceptual evidence is lacking.

Those seeking a purely cultural explanation might find some guidance in Nage figures like the cock-headed serpent, a manifestly spiritual image which nevertheless has some grounding in experience of large pythons. On the other hand, and given the hominoids' lack of supernatural powers, a better exemplar might be the two-headed snake, a real creature whose inexact name might suggest a fantastic being, and in fact has – by way of a sort of 'disease of language'– apparently led many Nage astray as well. At the same time, constructionists should be reminded that the two-headed snake, like the legless nightjar, seems fantastic only until one looks for possible empirical referents.

Whatever the recourse, anthropologists inclined to such interpretations will need to offer more than vague musings about unspecified social or cultural causes, founded on an assumption that hominoids cannot be, or cannot ever have been, real. Rather, they must demonstrate, with specific evidence, how exactly the images are constructed from things social and cultural or, better still, from social and cultural elements specific to the communities that maintain them. As is by now well documented, *Homo floresiensis* is challenging existing theories of human evolution. The occurrence, also on Flores, of intriguingly similar images of small-bodied hominoids presents an equally serious test for sociocultural anthropology. ●

Erb, M. 1987. When rocks were young and earth was soft: Ritual and mythology in northeastern Manggarai. PhD thesis, State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Forth, G. 1998. *Beneath the volcano: Religion, cosmology and spirit classification among the Nage of eastern Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

— 2004. *Nage birds: Classification and symbolism among an eastern Indonesian people*. London and New York: Routledge.

— 2005. Hominids, hairy hominoids and the science of humanity. *Anthropology Today* 21 (3): 13-17.

— 2008. *Images of the wildman in Southeast Asia: An anthropological perspective*. London and New York: Routledge.

— 2011a. Charcoal, eggplants, and small hairy hominoids: Dietary and behavioural components of a 'wildman' image from west central Flores (Indonesia). *Anthropos* 106: 57-68.

— 2011b. Disappearing wildmen: Capture, extirpation, and extinction as regular components of representations of putative hairy hominoids. In: Sodikoff, G. (ed.). *The Anthropology of extinction: Essays on culture and species death*, 200-218. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Henneberg, M., R.B. Eckhardt, & J. Schofield 2011. *The hobbit trap: How new species are invented.* Second edition. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc. (First edition, by Henneberg, M. & J. Schofield, published in 2008 under the title *The hobbit trap: Money, fame, science and the 'discovery of a new species*. Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press.)

Mijares, A.S. *et al*. 2010. New evidence for a 67,000-year-old human presence at Callao Cave, Luzon, Philippines. *Journal of Human Evolution* 59: 123-132.

Morwood, M.J. *et al*. 2009. Preface: research at Liang Bua, Flores, Indonesia. *Journal of Human Evolution* 57: 437-449.

Reich, D. *et al.* 2010. Genetic history of an archaic hominin group from Denisova Cave in Siberia. *Nature* 468:1053-1060.

Verhoeven, T. 1958. Proto-Negrito in den Grotten auf Flores. *Anthropos* 53: 229-32.

View publication stats